



The change in Regulations will have a serious impact in the development and growth of Plastic Recycling in Middle East, Africa and South America

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When Norway proposed in June 2018 the creation of a special category for plastics scrap, the general trade and industry were skeptical about the impact of the proposal. They were skeptical as to whether the proposal would even be accepted for serious consideration.

No one would have thought that it would pass so smoothly during the discussion at the Basel Convention in May this year. As much as it passed

without too much protest, there are enormous implications for the international trade in plastic scrap.

The governments of 187 countries have passed a resolution calling for advance approval for international movement of plastic scrap. The USA is not a signatory to the BASEL CONVENTION. The Basel Convention is a mechanism to control the transboundary movement of hazardous waste. Even though the US is not a signatory, this will have a

serious impact on exports to the rest of the world.

The Advance Approval involves detailed information including the individual details of the place of storage and/or origin of the scrap, names of trucking companies with a license to transport scrap, shipping lines, used ports, bank guarantees, environmental permits, names and license of buyers, etc. Administrative work will increase even more. Those who are strong in legal compliance will be the winners.

The inflow into the developing world will be reduced. Recycling will become uneconomical owing to lack of inputs. The recycling process will suffer in these developing regions.

The volume of international trade in plastics used to be about thirteen million tons as recent as in 2016.

Now it has come down to about eight million tons in 2018 and I even expect a substantial reduction in 2019.

Even before the change, the clean and sorted plastic materials had no dearth of demand. It has been most of the time in demand in domestic markets in the developed world. It is the mixed and contaminated materials which will have serious issues in international trade.

The principle of proximity will come into play. Recycling will take place at the place of origin of the scrap in case of mixed and contaminated materials. Under the changed scenario the volume of trade will be substantially reduced even for the recyclable materials. This will have a serious impact on the growth of the recycling industry in the developing world.


There is need for economy of scale to be competitive in the recycling business. A production capacity of about 20k tons is essential to be competitive. In the developing world it would be difficult to have such quantity in one location. Therefore, the industry will suffer.

The experience of UAE in the plastics recycling industry clearly demonstrates that UAE recycling failed due to lack of inputs. Plastic scrap import was not allowed. The domestic collection was not enough in terms of quality and quantity for the economy of scale.

As it is the world that is suffering from ignorance, such measures get disproportionate attention amongst the press, public and eventually politicians. The impact will be strong and powerful in a negative manner

unless there is proper explanation and knowledge sharing between the developed and developing world.

Plastic pollution has become the poster child of the world. It is very important that stakeholders (e.g. the resin producers, converters, brand owners and recyclers) invest heavily in educating the people. The mindset of the general public has become staunchly anti-plastics. We need to inform them that we cannot live without plastics even for 24 hours. Without plastics the food waste will increase; without plastics the fuel consumption will increase due to heavy vehicles and without plastics there will be challenges in hygiene and health.

The intention of the new regulations is good; we only hope that the administration in international trade is not too onerous for transboundary movements of recyclable plastics scrap. 

Surendra Borad Patawari is Founder and Chairman of Gemini Corporation N.V., Belgium. A well-known personality in the global recycling industry, he has served as the Chairman of the Plastics Committee of Bureau of International Recycling (BIR) for over a decade.



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